

Release Communiqué

JUNE 19, 1980

Experimental Oil Spills off Baffin Island Approved

Ottawa - Environment Minister John Roberts today announced approval for experimental oil spills to take place in the nearshore waters of Baffin Island during the summers of 1980 and 1981.

The spills are part of a four-year study to assess the impact of oil spills on arctic coasts and to develop spill-response measures.

The study will be conducted near the northern tip of Baffin Island on Cape Batt, 70 km from Pond Inlet, the nearest settlement. All participants in the study are satisfied that the environmental effects of the oil spills will be confined to a very small area.

A 30-man camp has been set up on Cape Batt, and work will start immediately. During the summer of 1980 until freeze-up in October, scientists will gather baseline data and also release a small amount of oil on a fingered section of shoreline in order to begin studying the long-term fate of oil on arctic beaches.

The major part of the study will take place in the summer of 1981. About 25 barrels of oil will be discharged in the nearshore waters of several bays. About 100 barrels of crude oil will be spilled into one bay, and a similar volume of crude oil with a dispersant, which breaks up oil and adds it to the water, will be discharged into another bay. A third bay will remain uncontaminated as a control.

(more)

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Minister
Environment Canada

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EXPERIMENTAL OIL SPILLS OFF BAFFIN ISLAND APPROVED

Ottawa - Environment Minister John Roberts today announced approval for experimental oil spills to take place in the nearshore waters of Baffin Island during the summers of 1980 and 1981.

The spills are part of a four-year study to assess the impact of oil spills on arctic coasts and to test clean-up measures.

The study will be conducted near the northern tip of Baffin Island on Cape Hatt, 70 km from Pond Inlet, the nearest settlement. All participants in the study are satisfied that the environmental effects of the oil spills will be confined to a very small area.

A 30-man camp has been set up on Cape Hatt, and work will start immediately. During the summer of 1980 until freeze-up in October, scientists will gather baseline data and also release a small amount of oil on a limited section of shoreline in order to begin studying the long-term fate of oil on arctic beaches.

The major part of the study will take place in the summer of 1981. Up to 275 barrels of oil will be discharged in the nearshore waters of several small bays. About 100 barrels of crude oil will be spilled into one bay, and a similar volume of crude oil with a dispersant, which breaks up oil and mixes it into the water, will be discharged into another bay. A third bay will remain uncontaminated as a control.

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In an intensive sampling and analysis program that will continue through 1983, scientists will study the fate of oil in the water and sediments and determine its effects on bottom-dwelling plants and organisms such as seaweed and clams.

One aim will be to determine whether ecosystems are damaged more by contamination with an oil-dispersant mixture than by untreated oil.

Also in 1981, in a series of smaller spills, about 75 barrels of oil will be discharged and then cleaned up. A variety of clean-up techniques will be employed, some of which are already in use in southern Canada but are untested under arctic conditions. Other methods that have yet to be used extensively, such as burning oil in place, will also be evaluated.

Fish, birds, or mammals will not be purposely exposed to the oil spills. Bird-scaring devices will be used and project personnel will attempt to ensure that no sea or land mammals enter the shoreline test areas.

The Baffin Island Oil Spill (BIOS) project, initiated by the federal government's Arctic Marine Oil Spill Program, is the culmination of several years of planning. The \$4-million project is managed by an international committee composed of representatives from the Department of Environment, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Canadian oil industry, the Norwegian government, and the United States Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Northern residents have been consulted throughout the planning of BIOS and support the aims of the project; in fact, the test site selected was suggested by the Pond Inlet Council.

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"The BIOS project will significantly improve Canada's ability to clean up oil spills in arctic waters," said Mr. Roberts. "In view of recent discoveries of oil in the Arctic and the possibility that this oil may be shipped through the Northwest Passage, Canadian officials must know the best method for dealing with spilled oil: attempting to clean it up from the shoreline, dispersing it with chemicals, or allowing it to degrade in the environment by natural weathering processes. These controlled spills give us the opportunity to determine the most effective countermeasure techniques."

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